

## Arms Fight SALT II, Due Soon, Is Likely to Undergo Revisions in Senate

Result After a Long Debate  
Could Prove Acceptable  
To Carter and Russians

### A Swap for the MX Missile?

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WASHINGTON—The strategic arms-limitation treaty that President Carter is expected to sign soon with the Soviet Union is unlikely to be approved by the Senate. But a treaty acceptable to the President and to the Russians still could survive.

That is the assessment of a wide range of observers in the Senate and the administration as an agreement on SALT II draws near. The formal signing by President Carter and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev could take place as early as next month in Europe.

A final treaty then must win approval of two-thirds of the Senate, or at least 67 members. And that road is full of legislative land mines. The debate is expected to be long and stormy, with supporters backing the treaty as a step toward slowing the arms race and opponents attacking it as a risk to U.S. defense. A final vote may not come until early next year.

### International Implications

Internationally, the outcome will profoundly influence U.S.-Soviet relations for years. At home, it will surely be a prominent issue in both parties' presidential contests next year—especially if Senate Minority Leader Howard Baker, who will play a major role in the SALT debate, is a candidate. For Jimmy Carter, Senate rejection of SALT would be the most serious foreign-policy rebuff suffered by an American President since Woodrow Wilson lost the Treaty of Versailles 60 years ago.

The crucial test in the Senate isn't expected to be whether the specific treaty that Mr. Carter signs is approved or rejected. "There isn't a chance that the treaty Carter sends up will get through the Senate," one Capitol Hill SALT expert says. Instead, the test will be whether the Senate votes to change the treaty only modestly or in a way that will undermine the basic agreement.

"It's inconceivable to me the Senate will simply reject SALT," says a top administration SALT strategist. "The question is whether we lose it de facto because what emerges is unacceptable to the Russians."

The White House currently counts about 45 votes for SALT, with about 35 Senators undecided. Generally, liberals back the treaty, and conservatives oppose it. But Senate passage of a viable treaty will depend on the votes of two dozen or so middle-of-the-road Senators, about equally divided between moderate Republicans and Southern Democrats.

### A Delicate Task

The administration's delicate task is to try to command a Senate majority to fend off major alterations of the treaty, and then to shape compromises needed to win the required two-thirds vote for final ratification.

That won't be easy, and predictions are hazardous. Comparison is often made with the ratification of the Panama Canal treaties last year, but that is a dubious guideline. "Panama was a case of most Senators struggling to make what they knew was the best policy compatible with their own political survival," says Sen. Sam Nunn, a critical undecided voice in the SALT fight. "SALT won't have the same (domestic) political repercussions," the Georgia Democrat says, "but substantively, it's far more important and difficult."

Sincere and deep divisions exist within the Senate on both the political calculations and the technical issues of strategic capabilities. The treaty, which would run through 1985, would limit the number of strategic missile-launchers each side could deploy. The ceiling on intercontinental ballistic missiles, long-range bombers and submarine-launched missiles would be set at 2,250. This ceiling is slightly less than the current Soviet inventory and slightly above the current U.S. level. The treaty also would limit both sides in modernizing their strategic weaponry.

### Proponents' Arguments

Proponents argue the treaty, while far from perfect, is essential in trying to curb the arms race. They say it forces some Soviet weapons cutbacks, limits the Russians' ability to introduce new weapons systems and preserves all current U.S. strategic plans.

"The key to winning passage is to stress over and over again that it strengthens our national security," argues Democratic Sen. Gary Hart of Colorado. Democrat John Culver of Iowa says, "SALT II doesn't end the arms race, but there isn't any doubt that without it the race would be accelerated."

Politically, supporters are heartened by polls showing that 70% of Americans support a strategic arms-limitation treaty. Ultimately, they believe, this public support is bound to sway fence-straddlers.

But opponents charge that SALT really isn't an arms-control treaty. Instead, they say, it would undercut existing U.S. technological advantages while enabling the Russians to continue their march to strategic superiority. Moreover, they argue that provisions for verifying Soviet compliance with the treaty are inadequate. Democratic Sen. Henry Jackson of Washington, a leading SALT critic, charges that the treaty involves risks "that it is imprudent for the United States to accept."

Doubts about adequate verification were reinforced recently when Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told a Senate committee that the loss of intelligence outposts in Iran that monitored Soviet missile-test facilities couldn't be fully replaced by other monitoring arrangements until the new treaty has almost expired. Defense Secretary Harold Brown, while conceding that it will take four or five years to regain all of the monitoring capability that the U.S. previously had, said this week that it will take only about a year to replace enough of the lost ability "to verify adequately Soviet compliance with provisions of SALT II."

U.S. officials believe the U.S. will be able to detect major Soviet weapons development—using electronic-monitoring systems in satellites, in aircraft and on the ground—before they could affect the strategic balance. But many Senators charge that this leaves the Russians too much room for cheating, and critics want assurances that compliance can be verified.

SALT foes are unimpressed with the public-opinion surveys. They note polls also show that most Americans think the U.S. is slipping behind the Russians in military might and that most fear the Russians would cheat on any agreement. Thus, they expect public support in a let's-get-tougher-with-the-Russians alternative versus President Carter's treaty.

Opponents initially may seek to have the Senate send the treaty back to the President, with specific instructions on how to renegotiate it. A more likely strategy, as Sen. Jackson says, is "to do everything we can to improve the agreement." Thus, such Senators will try to rewrite SALT with reservations and amendments—most of which the Russians would probably reject.

The most important Senate proposals would allow the U.S. to build "heavy" missiles, which have a launch weight of around 7,000 pounds or more (although such missiles haven't interested U.S. defense planners); would require the Soviet Backfire bomber to be included in the treaty's limits (the Backfire isn't counted because U.S. officials minimize its threat to this country); and would insist that Soviet ballistic missiles that could be used to strike European targets be subjected to the same limits that the treaty applies to deployment of the U.S. cruise missile.

Opponents also will raise questions because these are more easily understood by the public than technical arguments. In addition to the loss of monitoring posts in Iran, a major issue involves the Soviet use of encoding signals that missiles send back to control stations during test flights, making it difficult to verify compliance; the Russians have agreed not to encode anything covered by the treaty, but SALT opponents don't trust this pledge. The pro-treaty votes of several Senators—including Democrats John Glenn of Ohio and Dale Bumpers of Arkansas—probably rest on a satisfactory resolution of verification issues.

Anti-SALT Senators also will push provisions designed to correct any ambiguities in the treaty. One provision would explicitly state that the U.S. has the right to build more silos than it has land-based missiles, thus allowing use of a so-called shell game to make the missiles less vulnerable to attack. Another would say the U.S. has unrestricted rights to transfer technology to allies. U.S. officials contend both these prerogatives are part of the draft treaty anyway, but the Russians interpret the treaty differently.

Although the White House's official position is that it won't accept any amendments, the more-probable strategy will be to agree to mild countermeasures. Observers say such symbolic changes could enable the treaty to squeak through the Senate and eventually prove acceptable to the Soviets. For example, to head off charges that the treaty will weaken the U.S. position in future negotiations, Sens. Culver and Hart plan to offer a measure that would prevent the administration from extending, without congressional assent, a treaty addendum that limits the deployment of certain missiles through 1981; privately, this proposal is acceptable to the administration.

But it will be difficult to fashion a way to win over a few uncommitted Senators without undermining the agreement with Moscow. "We're very unsure what the Russians' absorption level is," one Senate SALT participant says.

#### SALT as a Wedge

Ironically, pro-defense lawmakers will seek to use the arms-control treaty as a vehicle to extract commitments to develop costly new weapons systems; already, both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees are seeking to force the President to agree to a \$20 billion-plus MX mobile missile system; proponents argue that the mobile system would be less vulnerable to Soviet attack than the current stationary, land-based missiles.

Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota and Republican Sen. Mark Hatfield of Oregon—warn that if the price of a treaty is expensive new weapons systems, they will oppose SALT. Privately, the White House dismisses these threats, but the Senators insist they are serious.

Clearly, considerable skill will be required for the administration to walk these tightropes. A crucial factor could be the role of Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd. The West Virginia Democrat rescued the Panama Canal treaties for the White House, but he insists he is uncommitted on SALT II. Without Sen. Byrd's active assistance, the White House is in trouble.

Jurisdictionally, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has chief responsibility for the treaty, but the Armed Services Committee may play a more critical role. That panel is unlikely to officially vote on SALT before it goes to the Senate floor. But the committee will hold important hearings, and it is filled with Senate heavyweights: Sen. Jackson in opposition, Sens. Culver and Hart in support, and Chairman John Stennis of Mississippi and Sen. Nunn as critical middlemen.

#### Role of Joint Chiefs

Especially significant in these hearings will be the effectiveness of Defense Secretary Brown and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in making the military case for SALT. There is little doubt the chiefs will back the treaty, but opponents expect to undercut that support by contending that top military advice was sometimes ignored during the negotiations. "We'll fry them (the Chiefs) in oil," a leading opposition strategist predicts.

Outside of the government, a potentially important influence is Henry Kissinger. The former Secretary of State offered a negative critique of SALT in a recent interview with *The Economist*, the British magazine. But the administration has periodically briefed him on the emerging treaty and expects his eventual support. "If he were here, he would be presenting a treaty like this," a top Carter official says. Others argue that SALT II is a better treaty than the preliminary Vladivostok agreement Mr. Kissinger engineered 4½ years ago.

But the most important Republican in the equation is Howard Baker. The politically resourceful minority leader will try to bolster his 1980 presidential hopes by dominating the SALT issue. He realizes that some GOP activists still resent his support for the Panama Canal treaties. Nevada's Sen. Paul Laxalt pointedly suggests that Mr. Baker has an opportunity to "get well" by forcefully opposing SALT.

Sen. Baker indicates he will oppose this treaty and push hard for a much tougher version. If so, he is likely to influence at least a handful of such GOP middle-of-the-roads as Oklahoma's Henry Bellmon and California's S. I. Hayakawa.

#### Sen. Baker's Options

Nevertheless, some SALT supporters think Mr. Baker will end up with them. They see the Tennessee Republican extracting a public commitment from President Carter for a stronger defense posture. Thus, Sen. Baker could claim credit for explicitly reversing a U.S. military slide as a worthy price for supporting SALT. But it is far from certain that Sen. Baker would consider such an arrangement or that a politically troubled President Carter would help give such credit to a potential rival.

Indeed, White House officials are counting on passage of SALT to provide the incumbent with an image of decisiveness and effectiveness. A defeat, they realize, probably would make Mr. Carter politically impotent. Even a delay in the Senate vote until next year would create problems at the start of a reelection campaign. Thus, the White House plans an all-out effort to win passage; top presidential adviser Hamilton Jordan is spearheading the effort to rally public and political support.

Privately, many Senators doubt that the White House's public-relations plans will much matter. And they are concerned about the White House's ability to outmaneuver the well-organized and articulate opposition. "The real key is to get and stay on the offensive," Sen. Hart warns.

Ultimately, the critical factor may be the persuasiveness and popularity of Jimmy Carter. "SALT should stand on its own merits and not on the President's popularity," says Senate Democratic Whip Alan Cranston of California, a leading SALT supporter. "But," he adds, "we would have a better chance if the President were stronger."